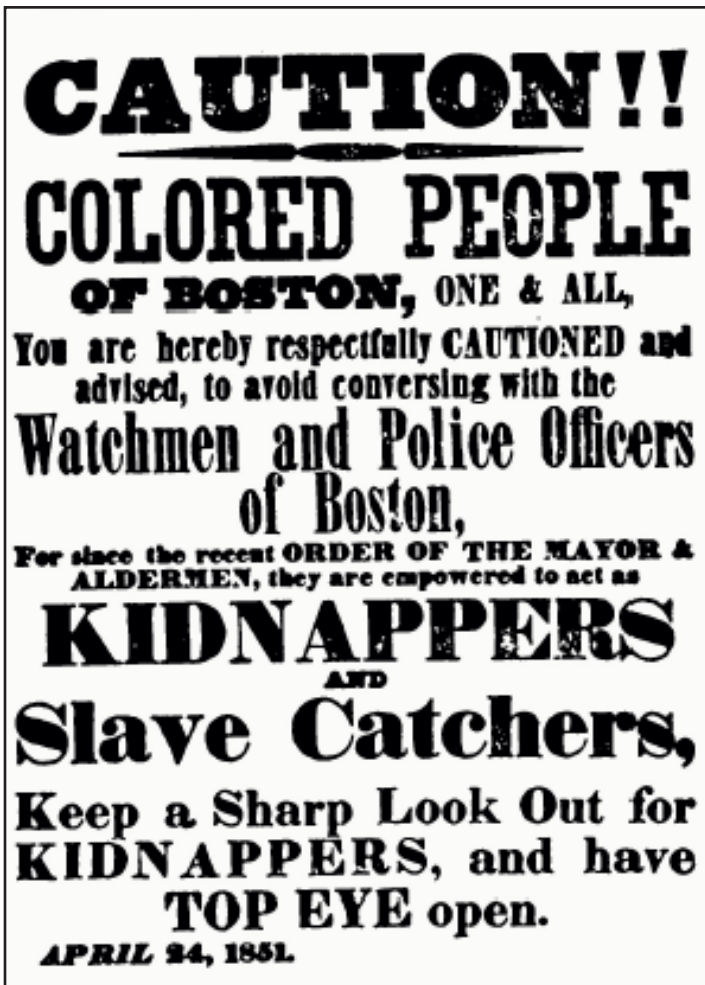


Activity 5

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850

In 1850, the government passed the Fugitive Slave Law. This law was hated by abolitionists throughout the country. This law allowed slave catchers to come up to the northern free states, such as Massachusetts, and capture people that ran away from slavery. The law also made it illegal to help people escaping slavery. If you were caught helping runaways, the fine was \$1,000 and six months in prison. Because no proof was needed by the slave catchers and people that were caught could not defend themselves in court, even free African Americans ran the risk of being captured and brought into slavery. Because of these risks, the abolitionists of Boston posted this sign throughout the city.



Carefully look at the sign then answer the following questions.

1. If you lived in 1850s Boston, how do you think you may have felt if you saw this sign hanging up around your neighborhood? Why?

2. The last line of the poster says "have TOP EYE open." What do you think this expression means?
